



December 2025 Newsletter

1. October AGM

At the AGM in October, we were delighted to welcome **Lynne James** as a Trustee onto the Committee, along with **Anne Cripps** and **Suheil Shahryar**, who had been co-opted during the year. They were all elected full Trustees at the AGM.

It was also a pleasure to elect **Viv Chandler** as our Honorary President. She succeeds **Eric Midwinter**, who sadly died in August.

2. Notes from the committee

Following the resignation of **Roger Thompson** as Chairman due to ill health, the Committee are pleased to announce that **Judith Moseley**, our Secretary and Vice Chairman, will be taking over as Acting Chairman. We thank Roger for all his hard work over the past two years and wish him well.

We are also delighted to announce that **Penny Turner** has agreed to be our new Treasurer, for which we are all extremely grateful. It is not the easiest position to fill and Penny has the necessary experience and is already swiftly picking up the reins.

At this time, we would also like to thank our previous Treasurer, **Gillian Edwards**. She has put a lot of work into digitising and running our financial system over the past two years. Sadly, her recent ill health made it necessary for her to resign but we would like to record our very grateful thanks to her and hope that she recovers her full health before too long.

3. New Members

We have welcomed several new members recently – **Shelagh Herbert**, **Aihua Zhou**, **Norman Deas**, **Graham Cooper**, **John Goodson**, **Jill Burder** and **Jenny Sullivan**. We hope

you enjoy your time with us. We are also delighted to welcome back **Pat Flanagan**, a previous member for many years.

4. Subs Reminder

This is just a gentle reminder that subs for the year 2025/26 were due on 1st November. Most members have already paid but if you haven't yet, we would be grateful if you could do so as soon as possible. Thank you.

5. Online Learning Events – December

These are FREE to all UK members and are organised by the national u3a for the benefit of members. For further information about the talks, go to <https://www.u3a.org.uk/learning>.

In December, there is something for everyone as the subjects of the Zoom talks include: Feats of Engineering: Amazing Tunnels; Introduction to Bridge; Secrets of the Human Brain; The Importance of Fungi; Making your Apple iPhone easier to use; Laughter Yoga; What the future changes in landlines will mean for you; Festivals of Light; Qigong; Mindfulness & Meditation; The Role of AI in our Social & Emotional Wellbeing.

6. December Meetings

- 4th December – Christmas Miscellany
This will be an enjoyable afternoon of Christmas readings to help you get into the Christmas spirit.
- 18th December – Christmas Party

As the first Thursday in January is New Years Day there will be no meeting on that day.

The only meeting in January will be on Thursday, 15th January, when Mike Barbakoff will be talking on 'The Secret War in St Albans 1939–45'.

There will be a list of all the meetings planned for 2026 in the January newsletter. All meetings start at 2.15 in the Abbeyfield Hall in the Harpenden Trust Halls above the Co-op.

We wish you a very Happy Christmas and all the very best for the New Year!

Group Reports

Please note, for further information please contact the relevant group leaders by following [THIS LINK](#).

Church & Pub Group

The Church & Pub group has been running for some time now. Currently those who organise the events are on rotation. It was my turn for November to arrange for someone to give a guided tour of the church and to book meals at the pub afterwards for group members. The last group meeting was held at St John's Church in Southdown hosted by the vicar, Revd Tim Vickers. This was followed by lunch at The Engineer.



Tim Vickers addressing the u3a group in the church

Tim gave a superb talk covering many aspects of the church. The original church was called the "paper" church as it had been constructed on a timber framework and filled in with frail material. It was destroyed by a fire in 1905. A new church on the current site was consecrated in 1908.



Church and Pub Group in the church with our guide - The Vicar, Tim Vickers

Later in 1963 the Lady Chapel, behind the altar, was completed. Further additions included a porch at the west end of the church built in the 1980s.

We were surprised to learn of a memorial in the church commemorating the death of Edward Colley who drowned on the Titanic in 1912 on his birthday. The brass plaque is shown in the below photograph, the plaque is to the front left of the church.



Plaque wording

To the Glory of GOD and in loving memory of EDWARD POMEROY COLLEY Born 15th April 1875, entered into the Life Beyond 15th April 1912, through the sinking of the Steamship Titanic.

These Doors were given by his three Brothers So he bringeth them unto the haven where they would be.

Steve Gledhill

Creative Writing Group

At our November meeting we read Haikus that we had written earlier.

I would recommend that you read them, read them again and you will really enjoy them when you read them a third time;

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Her lacework glistens Geometric perfection Spider sits, waiting... | Show me your face, Moon Don't play hide and seek with clouds Reveal your beauty! | Wet Ill-favoured gargoyle Gargles with cold winter rain spits it down my neck. |
| Drive carefully Fog inside and out I demolish the gatepost - good riddance to it! | u3a Walk Sloes, acorns, apples. Crunch. Autumn's brushed tweeds Rustle restlessly | Remembrance Sunday Thank you to those who did what I did not have to |
| tiny wavelets lap hot sun glints on azure sea shrimps nibble my toes | delicate jewels glinting on dewy wet grass autumn has arrived | When did it begin Perhaps it never started Time before big bang |
| What does it matter if there is only matter If so, what's the point | A blade of grass bends A dew drop softly dangles Dancing winds whisper | Sun on horizon Glow on shimmering waters A dragonfly sits |

Explore London Group

Visit to Chelsea – 20th September

15 members met Colin Oakes at Sloane Square station and he told us about the origins of Chelsea as a port dealing in fish, cheese and later the centre of porcelain and fashion. The River Westbourne used to run into the Thames here. We walked along King's Road, once a private road, to the Duke of York's Square which is now a community venue and the location of the Saatchi Gallery.

Royal Avenue leads down to the Chelsea Hospital and is the supposed home of James Bond. Back to King's Road and smart shops, the Town Hall and Registry office, where a wedding was taking place.

The Pheasantry is an old hall that was the haunt of many pop stars in the 60's and a ballet school run by a famous dancer. The Moravian burial ground had bells installed to deter grave robbers.

We passed down Smith Terrace where a synagogue is located and learned that there was a large Jewish community here once. Oakley Street had associations with John Betjeman and his amour Lady Cavendish, lady in waiting to Princess Margaret. On to Flood Street, where once the river encroached before the embankment was built.

Lunch was at The Phene hostelry near to the Albert Bridge and the river. After lunch we continued along Cheyne Walk and the homes of Rosetti, Swinbourne, and George Eliot amongst many others. The traffic is intrusive here. Chelsea Manor, now demolished, was the home of Henry VIII and was later occupied by Katherine Parr and Elizabeth 1.

On to Tite Street, home of Oscar Wilde, the Army Museum, the Chelsea Physic Garden, and Chelsea Hospital where the Chelsea Flower Show takes place. Ranelagh Gardens were once renowned as a pleasure garden. Back to Sloane Square and home. There are 193 blue plaques in Chelsea so we only managed to see a small number.

Pauline Waddilove

German Conversation Group

Despite the challenges presented by German grammar, it doesn't stop a hardy cohort getting together once a month to tackle fun subjects in this arcane language – then console each other over “Englischer Tee und Kekse.”

To all at the u3a, we say “Frohe Weihnachten!” Our next meeting dates are:

- 30th December 2025 (TBC)
- 27th January 2026
- 24th February 2026
- 31st March 2026

For further details, please contact **Sharon Torres**

History Group

The next meeting of the History Group will take place on Tuesday 9th December when there will be the annual History Group Quiz. This is always an enjoyable event, as we divide into teams, and I look forward to seeing a good attendance from members. The event will, as usual, be held at the Harpenden Trust Hall, and starts at 2.30, although the room is available for members from 2.00. There will be the usual £1 charge to cover the room hire.

Look forward. to seeing members at this annual History event

Roger Thompson

Italian Conversation Group

There is always new vocabulary to pick up during an afternoon of Italian conversation and our last get together was no different. We had words like 'heron' and 'pools' to learn as we listened to another delightful recording made by my neighbour, Donatella, who hails from Milan. This time, she 'took us on a walk' from Peters Green to The Bull in Whitwell for "un buon pranzo... e anche una birra."

Our next meeting will be held in Peters Green on Friday, 12th December 2025 when the topic will be: Quali sono i tuoi tradizioni per Natale?

And while on the subject we say: "Buon Natale a tutti all 'u3a!"

For further details, please contact **Sharon Torres**

Needlecraft Group

The group is still looking for two new members. Members do any sort of needlecraft, counted cross stitch, embroidery, ordinary cross stitch to a pattern, patchwork or even knitting. I am sure there must be members who would like to join our friendly group to carry on their stitching interest.

We meet on the First and Third Wednesdays of the month. Members take it in turns to host.

Please come to join us.

Anne Stephens

Reading For Pleasure Group 1

Our recent meeting was a busy one. Unfortunately our October meeting had to be cancelled, so we had two books to discuss, and also a new member, Jenny Thomas, to welcome.

Our first book, "The Burning Chambers", by Kate Mosse, was set in the Carcassonne region in 1562. This was a time when religious intolerance against the Huguenots, who were Protestants, was raging. Kate Mosse is a very vivid writer, and her descriptions of the torture chambers were horrific. Fortunately, her descriptions of the beautiful countryside around was a welcome distraction from all the cruelty of the human race. The characters were well-defined, and Minou Joubert's concern for her family, the bravery of Piet Reydon, a young Huguenot convert, and the satisfying conclusion were all very uplifting.

Our second book was "The Secret Hours" by Mick Herron. This book very much divided opinion. Two members loved all the twists and turns, whilst the rest of us found it confusing and disturbing. It concerns the Monochrome enquiry, which has been delving for years into the activities of the Secret Service in Berlin, just after it was united. Needless to say, the Secret Service wants those times to remain a secret! Then the Otis file turns up! What classified secrets does it hold? What damage will it do to the reputation of the Secret Service?

Reading For Pleasure Group 2

We had a lively discussion in November over *My Father's House* by Joseph O'Connor. Based on a true story about an escape line from the Vatican during WW2, concerns were raised about differentiating between which parts of the book were true and which parts were invented by the author.

On a lighter note, Steve pointed out that the £10 note which features the face of Jane Austen also includes her quote 'I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading' which we all agreed with.

We're looking forward to our Christmas lunch at The Engineer in December and a discussion on selected short stories from *The Penguin Book of Christmas Stories: From Hans Christian Andersen to Angela Carter*, edited by Jessica Harrison.

Nicky Wilcox

Reading for Pleasure Group 3

The group meets monthly (usually the second Tuesday of the month in the morning) in members' houses. The last book we read was "Old Baggage" by Lissa Evans. This book was a funny and bittersweet portrait of a woman who, during the Women's Suffrage Campaign was a militant, but now in middle age looked for a fresh mould into which to pour her energies.

Our next read is "The Girl with the Louding Voice" by Abi Dare. A story of a fourteen-year-old Nigerian girl who is forced into marriage in exchange for her family's rent on their house. She dreams of being a teacher but meets many challenges along the way. The book explores themes of female empowerment, resilience and the importance of speaking up for oneself.

For more information about the Reading Group, please contact **Jane Leek**.

Science and Technology Group

The Science and Technology group satisfies the inquisitive by covering a wide range of topics. Speakers are drawn from club members as well as friends and acquaintances of members. This time our speaker, Peter Wilson, was an old friend of mine who I have known for around 50 years because we both worked at Marconi Instruments in St Albans.



Peter Wilson demonstrating radio transmission in his Ham Radio talk

He spoke about his hobby of Ham Radio. He set up his transmitter/receiver (an Icom IC7300 running 100 watts) in the meeting room and erected an Inverted "V" dipole (aerial) in the pub garden.



Members of the group listening to the Ham Radio talk

He outlined the history of amateur radio and many other aspects. He demonstrated two-way radio using his equipment and spoke to a number of radio operators over a wide range. Initially to callsign G5BOB in Milton Keynes on 7.150 MHz (40 metre band) then later to EU1DX in Belarus on 21.200 MHz (15 metre band).

A fascinating insight into Peter's interesting hobby. As Michael Caine allegedly said, "not many people know that!"

In December the Science and Technology group has a break – we have a Christmas lunch instead.

The following are the first meetings of 2026:

- 21st January – A brief history of Exoplanets – planets beyond our solar system – Stephen Mills.
- 18th February – The gas journey from the North Sea to your home boiler – Mike Pearson
- 18th March – Astro-photography – Robin Barrett
- 15th April – The organs of speech – producing and understanding natural language – Paul Spinks

Steve Gledhill

Walking Group

It was fine yet again for our first outing this month, from the Prae Wood Arms to St Albans through the Gorhambury estate and round Verulamium Park: a reminder of the splendid Roman remains on our doorstep.



Our second walk, from Gustard Wood to Ayot St Lawrence, was wet; but carpets of autumn leaves under dripping trees have their own beauty, and the Palladian church provided the perfect sheltered spot for a coffee break.



Hugh Fricker